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The Mediat(izat)ion of Urban Leisure: Screening the Event

David Rowe and Brett Hutchins

Introduction: Watching, Being and Making the Event

Live events (meaning those involving co-present performers and audiences for specified periods) have long been an important feature of urban leisure. In modernity, cities developed specific enclosed spaces (such as concert halls, theatres and sport stadia) in which performances could take place in response to the development of the culture and entertainment industries that 'produced' leisure practiced by professionals before paying crowds, supplemented by ancillary commercial practices involving gambling, hospitality and merchandising (Sayre and King, 2003). Industrialism and capitalism, in creating the conditions for the precise calculation of labor time, also brought into being the notions of leisure and recreation as means of reproducing labor power (Clarke and Critcher, 1985; Rojek, 1985). These arrangements involved the rationing of real-time presence: crowds would assemble for special moments, enjoying the pleasures of the unique event and relishing the collective experience of 'having been there' which could, in turn, be 'traded' as the cultural capital associated with the aura of a never-to-be-repeated temporal-spatial-performative conjunction. This imperative of physical presence was especially powerful before the invention of electronic media, especially television, that could reproduce and transmit the experience (Rowe, 2004). A specific mode of fan-based sociality emerged in which spectators self-consciously participated in the spectacles to which

they were witnesses. In the case of sporting events, a particular kind of fandom was created. Their competitive framework created two or more 'sides', meaning that the audience was interested not only in seeing their preferred sportspeople win, but also in active dialogue with their opposition within the audience, often leading to their segregation on grounds of public order.

This experience was very different from, for example, that of attending an event with a reproducible text, notably entailing exposure to already-prepared films or newsreels. The action was three-rather than two-dimensional, and the watched shared space with the watchers. However, the subsequent development of real-time mediation established an intimate relationship between the enclosed venue and the world beyond. The viewing at a distance made possible by live broadcasting, which brought the sights and sounds of the concert hall or stadium into the home, gave new, expanded access to the 'action'. Increasingly, mediation enhanced the viewing experience in ways that, via various angles, multi-speed replays, close-ups and so on, became in various ways superior to that of the in-venue spectator confined to a single viewing position and often with restricted sightlines (Dayan and Katz, 1992). As a result, large screens were brought into the live venue as, ironically, compensation for being co-present in real-time and space (although, crucially, co-presence was still a source of 'bragging rights'). The history of live event broadcasting has involved, therefore, the progressive refinement of mediated experience across and between cities, insinuating itself into the stadium, spill-over areas, remote live sites, licensed premises and private homes (Levy, 2017).

This development, though, has been followed by another that is less dependent on fans being exposed to ever more sophisticated live broadcast texts. Just as fans created spectacles inside enclosed venues and, especially in sport, in moving to and from them, they have also come to

possess the means of making their own live media texts. Continuing advances in hardware and software technologies position the smartphone as a key screen in the presentation and consumption of live and on-demand entertainment content (Goggin, 2012). But sophisticated mobile cameras and computational photography and video recording applications (apps) also mean that live events are sites where mobile users can informally live stream or distribute content (Palmer, 2014). In other words, the same devices that can receive professionally produced texts are also used by 'amateurs' to make and disseminate them. These new practices of making media texts in and around live events by the people attending or, more precisely, attending *to* them, have had significant consequences for urban leisure. It is now possible to engage in an unprecedented, real-time mass activity of 'sharing'. The few-to-many broadcast model still thrives (arguably, it is substantially responsible for the commercial survival of free-to-air and subscription television), but it is accompanied by peer-to-peer communication (fans sending messages to their significant others and friendship networks) and the many-to-many communication of uploading fan-generated texts made available to anyone via the Internet. This communicative apparatus enables whole, multi-point narratives of the fan experience to be created at, around and at various distances from the event location (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012).

This chapter analyses the ways in which, in the 21st century, event-based urban leisure has developed into a set of multiply mediated practices which is highly dependent on access to a multitude of screen devices and uses. It is argued that mediation has evolved into a progressive *mediatization* whereby the event is shaped by the technologies and practices of its own representation (Hjarvard, 2013). Therefore, media communication must now be understood not as a secondary process of relaying a primary event, but as an integral element of the urban event itself. Although any live performance is affected by these developments, we argue that they

are most advanced in sporting contests, and several of the examples that we use draw on the experiences of sport in urban environments.

Event Mobilities

Live events necessarily involve high levels of mobility (Salazar et al, 2017). They require audiences of various sizes to assemble at a particular venue, where they will encounter performers who have also travelled there. In order to make the event possible, others will have to travel to the same place – the workers who service the event, police and security staff to control and monitor those attending, and the specialist media who are engaged in recording and covering it for a wider audience, most of whom cannot be present. The degree of mobility has expanded with the development of a global leisure and entertainment industry. Rock and pop musicians and athletes, especially, engage in global tours and tournaments, taking advantage of technological developments in travel – especially the jet airplane – to traverse the globe each year, stopping briefly in one city and country before moving on to the next. Elite performers have the largest supporting entourage, drawing in their wake a substantial media contingent supplemented by local journalists. This rolling cycle of mobile events requires sophisticated organization, and also has significant environmental consequences – for example, Toby Miller (2018) has noted the vast expenditure of carbon intensive energy on travel involved in global events like the FIFA World Cup, Formula 1 and the Olympic Games, while saturation media coverage demands a massive and largely hidden consumption of materials and electricity (Maxwell and Miller, 2012).

A key aspect of live events is that they are rigorously scheduled. There is little or no opportunity for variation of agreed place and time. This strict limitation means that substantial live events are newsworthy in themselves because they have the potential to disrupt the orderly routines of cities (*International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2008; Sam and Hughson, 2011). Large numbers of people pass along public and private transport corridors, patronize local establishments and occupy public space. The subsequent creation of spectacle lends itself to formal media coverage – a standard component of broadcast news bulletins, for example, entails showing sport fans in bars and city squares, often performing by invitation for the cameras to express their impressions and sporting allegiances in the 'costumes' of their various teams. In some cases, especially when involving association football, media coverage addresses the possibility and transpiration of disorder, usually involving physical confrontations between rival fan 'firms' (Redhead, 2015). Audio-visual footage of, and commentary on, these conflicts provide newsworthy material (often much replayed and frequently out of context as stock footage), sometimes verging on the exaggerated representation and projection of 'moral panic' (Critcher, 2003).

However, the subjects of these representations are not passive recipients of the media gaze. In the pre-digital era, they photographed and videoed each other and contributed to 'fanzines' that often defiantly discussed their experiences and accused the authorities, media organizations and 'moral entrepreneurs' of bias, exaggeration and misrepresentation (Haynes, 1995). In Britain during the last century, this reaction to media coverage – and what was regarded as the demonization of football fans – even produced a "hit and tell" literary genre (Redhead, 2015), while one notable academic work (among many dealing with the subject of football hooliganism) took its title from a chant by Millwall FC fans in response to being called 'animals' by the press – 'We Hate Humans' (Robins, 1984). In the digital and mobile era,

though, sport fans do not have to wait to print their views and images on paper fanzines. The arrival of the Internet made it possible for them to post content to proliferating fan-based websites, although until the widespread availability of smartphones and Wi-Fi networks there were inevitable delays in uploading via desktop and laptop computers. Now, just as the institutional media cover the arrival of visiting sport fans and their passage to and from the stadium, the fans themselves can communicate their own experiences, freely posting messages, images and sounds via mobile social media. In some cases, they may be in a position to challenge mainstream media accounts of widespread fan disorder by demonstrating that they are selective and exaggerated, or that the violence was initiated by rival fans or by the authorities. They can also use the same privately-held media technologies to celebrate legal, joyous expressions of fandom on the streets or to arrange fights and provide graphic footage of violence and disorder. This process of collective mediation can continue all the way to the venue or stadium – but it does not stop there.

In and Outside the Venue

The economic imperatives of commercial popular culture, which involved the increased expense of transporting performers across ever-greater distances, have increasingly demanded larger venues to accommodate bigger crowds. Smaller venues in inner-city and suburban neighborhoods have in many cases been supplanted by large stadia in both 'brown'- and 'green-field' sites. To a substantial degree these changes have been caused by urban developments, including gentrification, that have imposed intense pressure to relocate sport spaces in densely populated working-class suburbs with rising land values (Bramham and Wagg, 2009). The historical parallels between popular music and sport (Rowe, 1995) became spatially accentuated when large sport stadia were temporarily re-purposed as venues for major pop and rock

concerts. Such ‘massification’ of large events, in the context of the increasingly lavish provision of live sound and vision for audiences in their homes via high-definition television, created the paradox that ‘being there’ might, as noted above, be an inferior experience to watching at a distance but also in camera-facilitated close up. The *auratic* pleasure of sharing the unique moment in real-time and space might seem like inadequate compensation for having to watch, from uncomfortable, expensive ‘nose bleed’ seats, performers who appear to be in miniature, while not having the advantage of replays and alternative points of view. It is for this reason that, as noted, vast screens were brought into the stadium to enable co-present spectators to see the action (in the case of rock music, this also meant the use of enormous stacks of speakers).

The large screens being viewed are vastly outnumbered by the small, handheld screens that are being used to communicate text and image beyond the venue. Indeed, it is not unusual to see sport crowd photographs in which many of those people present are looking at screens rather than directly at the physical spectacle for which they have paid. In turning themselves into media communicators, especially when using live streaming applications like Periscope, WeChat, Instagram Live Stories and Facebook Live, they may also find themselves in conflict with the event’s broadcast rights holders. Another material effect of the process of mediatization is clearly exposed here – it has shaped the sensory expectations of audiences and altered the structure and look of live venues. Seating has been removed to accommodate screens and the visual appearance of stadia adjusted to appeal to the televisual eye. Indeed, during global sport mega events, the location of the stadium may actually be determined by the visual touristic appeal of the establishment shot, as the camera pans across the telegenic sites of the city and its physical setting to the stadium (Weed, 2008). This was, for example, the media logic that, at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, led to the placement of a stadium in Cape Town

in an inappropriate, socially disruptive location (Broudehoux, 2017). Furthermore, inside the latest stadia are state-of-the-art media facilities designed both to give distant audiences the best view of proceedings and co-present audiences optimal opportunities to communicate their experiences to the same faraway audiences. It should be noted, though, that injudiciously built venues for mega events may become "white elephants", abandoned and allowed to fall into neglected disrepair once the global media gaze has found new sporting spaces on which to fix (Street, Frawley and Cobourn, 2014).

The developments described in this section hint at two important consequences of how media practices, devices and infrastructures are increasingly integrated into the planning and experience of live events. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the first involves attempts to limit the widespread use of mobile media devices in venues by controlling where and/or when users can access their smartphones, thereby limiting the sharing of audio-visual content via services such as YouTube, live.ly and Facebook. Such attempts to regulate mobile usage complicate the evolving expectations of many users, who now routinely engage in "mass self-communication" of their social experiences via social media and video-on-demand platforms (Castells, 2009). The second effect highlights the formalized spatial expansion of events through the creation of live sites operated in conjunction with the in-stadium or venue action, which is a development linked to the promotion of particular urban agglomerations as 'sporting cities' (e.g., Melbourne and London) or 'music cities' (e.g., Austin, Texas, and Berlin) (Sam and Hughson, 2011; Homan et al., 2016).

The diffusion of mobile-broadband networks and smartphones continues to challenge and alter social norms of co-present interaction and communication at-a-distance by citizens (Ling, 2008). The visible contestation of these norms is apparent in the staging of various cultural

events concentrated in sizable urban markets, including live comedy, music and sport. For instance, those people who purchased tickets for shows during the 2017 international tour of US comedian Chris Rock entered a phone-free event, with anyone caught contravening this condition of entry threatened with ejection from the venue. Underpinned by both experiential and intellectual property concerns, Rock's stance is shared by other comedians such as Dave Chappelle and (the now disgraced) Louis CK, and popular musicians including Alicia Keys, The Lumineers and Guns N' Roses (Hutchins, 2016a). Common to many of these examples is the use of a branded lockable pouch, Yondr, in which each attendee's smartphone is placed upon entry to the venue, carried with them during the event, and then unlocked again upon exit. Mobile phone recording has also been banned by a Melbourne live music venue and by the city's Comedy Festival, principally on the grounds of spoiling the experience of both performers and audiences (Harrison, 2018). In the case of live sport, the owner of the National Basketball Association's (NBA) Dallas Mavericks, celebrity entrepreneur Mark Cuban, opts for persuasion over confiscation in relation to mobile device use. He argues publicly that live NBA matches are events where spectators can experience the pleasure of looking up from their mobile screens to focus instead on the physical spectacle and excitement. Indeed, he contends, in an echo of Jonathan Crary's (1999) analysis of Western modernity's demand for close attention to particular forms of spectacle and text, that the constant distractions prompted by mobile screens in everyday life see people attend live matches so that they can "just stop staring" at their smartphones and get "away from all that" for a period (cited in Hutchins, 2016b, p. 429).

The motives of the performers and event promoters detailed here vary. Nonetheless, their actions and arguments all speak to the contested character of *auratic* pleasure and individual

and collective experiences. Overlaid on an image of a live music venue, the online sales pitch for the Yondr (2017) pouch mentioned above is a reflection of this contestation:

> We think smartphones have incredible utility, but not in every setting. In some situations, they have become a distraction and a crutch—cutting people off from each other and their immediate surroundings.
>
> Yondr has a simple purpose: to show people how powerful a moment can be when we aren't focused on documenting or broadcasting it.

This branded pouch is a profit-seeking material response to the ongoing "embedding" of mobile communications across a range of social settings and the differential effects produced by this process (Ling, 2012). It is but one example of how different orders of "non-mediatized and mediatized modes of contact and sharing" are created and balanced in the course of live events, thereby going to pressing questions about how best to organize social life in heavily mediated and mediatized environments (Hutchins, 2016b, p. 428; Couldry, 2012). It should be noted in passing, though, that attention and distraction have long been concerns for intellectuals as diverse as Walter Benjamin, Henri Bergson, Guy Debord, Edmund Husserl, Siegfried Kracauer and Gustave Le Bon (Crary, 1999).

Judging by the available contemporary news reports and their reader comments, reactions to the likes of Rock, Keys and Cuban range between enthusiastic embrace, muted acceptance and open frustration. The experience of a phone-free event appears to have been a pleasurable novelty for some attendees, allowing them to concentrate on the performance and enjoy the shared focus of the audience. For others, however, the need to put away their phone is an unwanted interference with, and intervention in, their leisure activities, breaking the promise of

"perpetual contact" made possible by far-reaching telecommunications networks and smartphone-based telephony, messaging and content sharing (Katz and Aakhus, 2002).

Debates over appropriate degrees of mobile media use and non-use highlight why live events are culturally significant features of urban life. They are sites at which the production of sociality is observable through the deliberate arrangement of people, spectacle, media, technology and infrastructure. This development recalls and re-contextualizes the arguments of Karin van Es (2017) and Paddy Scannell (2001, 2014) about television and the social experiences produced by live broadcasts, as well as bearing on debates about differential interpretations on global media events according to national, cultural and spatial context (Couldry, Hepp, and Krotz, 2010; de Moragas Spà, Rivenburgh, and Larson (1995). The organization of live events is conditioned by expectations of a specific experience or range of experiences for the audience; that is, "the possibilities of participation" and "effects of being there" (Scannell, 2001, p. 409; van Es, 2017, p. 6). The rise of the smartphone and its seeming ubiquity have, therefore, changed and problematized the anticipated "communicative entitlements" (Scannell, 2014, p. 207) attached to attendance at live events. For selected performers and attendees, a temporary suspension of mobile media use affords access to an experience that privileges sensory engagement and focused attention on the performance and/or spectacle. The right to be free of distractions caused by the mobile media use of others is, in effect, an entitlement in the course of live events that is dependent on collective effervescence, as conceived by Emile (Durkheim (1964), for their success (Couldry, 2003). However, for those people who want to share and upload, an inability to connect and bear witness to a live event via their smartphone inhibits an entitlement that they are able to exercise in many other domains, including assorted work, home and leisure activities. For them, to be disconnected is to lose access to the commercial platforms and services (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter)

that, justifiably or otherwise, function as repositories of "the social" for the multitudes of users who regularly share messages, as well as audio and/or visual content, in negotiating the competing meanings of their daily lives (Couldry and van Dijck, 2015), including of the live performances that they have witnessed. Yet, despite the differences between these contending communicative entitlements, each leads back to the same objective – connection with a wider social world through the experience of live events.

The second consequence of mediatization sees our focus move back to sport and the expanding scale of media events and spaces. Despite the increasing size of sport stadia, they still cannot accommodate all who would like to attend major events. Even huge venues have limited capacity, and mediatization has meant that many in the host and other cities believe, especially if they are in the same country and the national government has underwritten the event, that they have rights as cultural citizens to see them live through the media (Rowe, 2011). As a result, live sites have emerged as an essential feature of major sport events. They can be positioned across host and other cities, and may be in the shadow of the host stadium, in city squares and parks, and in other stadia. They have the advantage of offering, at little direct cost to the participant, a screen- and crowd-based sense of "being there" that is unavailable in the more atomized experience of "mobile privatisation" in the home (Williams, 1974: 26). While licensed outlets and restaurants can also provide screens for live collective viewing, the sociality of the live site is a closer simulation of being co-present. In so doing, it spreads and clusters the experience across the urban landscape, with crowds supporting rival teams and athletes expressing their affiliations through positioning in the available space, dress and conduct, and communicating with the live screen as if they could be seen and heard by the performers and spectators at the actual event site (Rowe and Baker, 2012a, b). The live site, as it grows in scale and frequency of use, also confronts the same matters of organization and practice as the 'main

event', including securitization and commercialization (Baker and Rowe, 2014; Fussey et al, 2011). Therefore, the once freewheeling ability of sports fans and curious bystanders to move easily between live sites and other venues connected to sport events is increasingly curtailed by bag searches for dangerous objects and goods that breach the exclusive intellectual property rights of the host sponsors.

Despite these impediments to mobility, during a long tournament such as the Summer Olympics and FIFA World Cup, in particular, host cities become the equivalent of giant film sets or television studios. The 'outside broadcasts' that once were dedicated to capturing and relaying the sporting action are, in the digital age, overwhelmed by the constant downloading and uploading of material by professionals and non-professionals alike. This 'dance' of representation is conducted across whole cities – the very presence of residents and visitors in large numbers in urban spaces for reasons linked with the sport event is grist for broadcast news bulletins and newspaper editions. Those same media subjects are constantly (perhaps compulsively) self-imaging and making images of all that is around them – of other people both familiar and unknown, of the landmarks that signify place, and even of the media that are watching them. In turn, they receive responses to the messages that they generate and to which they, in turn respond, in a hyper-active and –mediated feedback loop. Maintaining such busy rhythms of media-oriented urban leisure, it can be observed, requires regular, rapid-fire and often exhausting communicative work.

Conclusion: Splintered Urban Experiences?

The discussion presented in this chapter reveals that live events exemplify a deepening interpenetration of urban life, mediatized sociality, physical infrastructure, screen-based technologies, telecommunications networks, and professional labor (involving sophisticated

engineering know-how and international time-space coordination). It is essential to recognize the patterns and outcomes flowing from this process, especially given their connections to the global tourism, hospitality, leisure and culture industries, international sporting and cultural associations, gentrification, community groups, governments at multiple levels, and technology, telecommunications and media markets. Yet, left unstated in much of this chapter are the emerging differential impacts of the outlined events and processes on the urban fabric, which require further systematic investigation.

Another layer is being added to familiar forms of social inequality organized along the lines of income, education, gender, sexuality, race and/or disability. Sitting within and alongside each of these overlapping categories is, according to Jordan Frith (2012), the "splintering" of access to events, media technologies and the infrastructures of urban areas. Such concerns are often sublimated or overwhelmed by marketing messages, the popular excitement triggered by major events, the novelty of high-resolution screens of all sizes, and the "hyping" of new mobile software such as augmented reality mobile apps designed for use during live events. This splintering is about more than the already steep price of admission to stadia, venues or live sites, or the exorbitant cost and dubious quality of food, drink and merchandise once inside (Parry et al, 2018). Additional imposts are created by the capacity to afford and upgrade mobile devices, purchase broadband subscription plans linked to reliable telecommunications services, download and pay for 'freemium' and premium apps, and maintain a series of user profiles on services that encourage the constant posting of content. Full access to media-based sociability in urban spaces is a costly affair for many citizens, introducing new forms of differentiated consumption, access and exclusion in the experience of leisure. Ironically, even attendance at a phone-free event involves an additional cost embedded in the overall ticket price to cover the provision of yet another branded smartphone accessory, a Yondr pouch. This is a requirement

that further complicates the theme introduced at the outset this chapter, that of "watching, being and making the event". A new analytical imperative is to investigate who is able to watch and in what ways, who has the capacity to communicate meaningfully their experience of being at events, and to grasp the nature of the emerging zones of inclusion and exclusion that construct live events in mediatized urban environments. These are questions of structure, agency and power that even the shiniest new hand-held device cannot conceal or delete.

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